

Mid East Situation

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100 Russian Pilots Reported in Egypt Flying Interceptors

By WILLIAM BEECHER
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 13—American and other Western intelligence sources report that about 100 Soviet pilots have been sent to the United Arab Republic in recent weeks to man three or four squadrons of jet interceptors.

The sources say that this is in addition to 70 to 80 Russian pilots who have long been training Egyptian fliers in Egypt. The new complement of pilots is reported to be part of a military advisory force that now numbers 8,000 to 10,000 men.

Military and diplomatic sources have also provided the following reports on new Soviet activity in Egypt:

Approximately 100 pilots and their maintenance crews were transferred to Egypt from assignments with three or four operational squadrons in Russia. Some of the latest model MIG-21's were flown in as well, and other aircraft

The Russian pilots are believed to be operating from a number of airfields west of the Nile River, from Alexandria to well south of Cairo. They often scramble into the air when radar shows Israeli planes are heading toward the Suez Canal, which is only three to five minutes flying time from Cairo.

Israeli-Soviet Clash Feared

To date no direct engagement between Israeli and Soviet jets has been reported.

The principal concern of many Nixon administration officials is whether the Russians will decide to take over primary responsibility for air defense of all Egypt, including the west bank of the Suez Canal. If this happens, Defense and State Department officials fear Israeli jets will be sure to clash with Soviet jets.

For the time being, Israel is forgoing deep raids into the Cairo-Alexandria region to avoid a direct confrontation

with Soviet pilots and anti-aircraft missile crews.

Information Sketching

American and Western intelligence sources concede that information on the precise shape of the Soviet build-up in Egypt is sketchy and in some details open to dispute.

For example, Israeli officials recently provided the United States with tape recordings of intercepted radio transmissions that included 200 excerpts attributed to Russian pilots.

American sources say these recordings included duplications and do not demonstrate that there are now more than 200 Soviet pilots flying missions in Egypt. Presumably much of the independent United States information on the presence of Soviet pilots also comes from intercepted communications.

American analysts believe the Russians decided to deploy some of their own air defense

groups, fear the raids deep dermine President Nasser.

The Russians are believed to have been angered by an air strike several weeks near Helwan, nine miles south of Cairo, in which some Russian military advisers were reported to have been killed and others wounded. This incident has not been publicly mentioned by the

Russians, the Egyptians or the Israelis.

Meanwhile, the Nixon Administration is considering whether to provide additional F-4 and A-4 fighter-bombers to Israel.

Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, is coming to Washington next week, apparently to renew his country's plea for arms and economic assistance. Israel is believed to be seeking 25 to 50 F-4 Phantom jets and 100 A-4 Skyhawks.

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were borrowed from the Egyptian Air Force.

The 8,000 to 10,000 Soviet military advisers in Egypt, up from a total estimated at 2,500 to 4,000 men before the build-up, are said to include entire air defense missile and anti-aircraft artillery crews, maintenance men and communications specialists.

Twenty SAM-3 air defense missile sites under construction would contain 160 missile launchers when they are completed. Some estimates suggest that for a really effective defense of military bases in the Alexandria, Cairo and Aswan Dam areas, the Russians might want to expand to 40 SAM-3 sites.

One unconfirmed report is that the Russians have moved an armored brigade of troops to provide ground defenses against possible Israeli commando raids on the missile sites.

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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

THE WASHINGTON POST

Friday, May 8, 1970

D17

Effort to Suppress Raid News Denied

By Jack Anderson

The New York Times charged this week that "a top official at the White House" had asked reporters "not to embarrass the government by printing the details" of week-end U.S. air raids over North Vietnam.

The allegation was made by James Reston, the distinguished Times columnist, in a story that likened the "anti-Communist, anti-intellectual, anti-university, anti-newspaper" atmosphere in Washington to the days of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The charge is particularly serious in view of the Nixon administration's avowed determination to avoid the "credibility gap" which plagued the Johnson administration on the Vietnam issue.

Contacted by this column, Reston refused to name the White House official who had tried to manage the news. "You may ask," said Reston, "but I'm not going to tell you."

He insisted, however, that the incident had made him "damned mad" and that he had put through an angry call to the White House aide responsible for the attempted suppression.

Max Frankel, chief of the Times' Washington bureau, also refused to talk about the incident. "I just don't want to discuss it," he said.

Nevertheless, this column

has learned that the official was Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's top foreign policy adviser, who talked to Frankel about the air raids.

Kissinger said it was "absolutely untrue" that he had asked the Times not to print the details of the raids to spare the government embarrassment. He gave this account of his conversations with Frankel and Reston:

Frankel called Kissinger several times after Hanoi announced that American planes had bombed parts of North Vietnam. Frankel said he had the story on good authority but wanted to know how many U.S. planes were involved.

"I said I didn't want to get into numbers," Kissinger recalled. He also mentioned national security.

Frankel shot back: "Then you don't deny it."

Referred to Pentagon

"I'm not confirming it nor denying it," Kissinger said. "I think you should go to the Pentagon for this."

After Frankel hung up, Kissinger said he called Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and asked that the Times be given as much information as possible about the raids.

He then called Frankel back to make it clear that he had no objection to the story but simply didn't want to be in the position of giving out details he felt should come from the military.

"I specifically told Frankel

that I would use my influence with the Pentagon to help him get the facts," Kissinger said. "The last thing that was in our minds was to keep this secret."

Kissinger acknowledged, however, that the first announcement of the raids had come from Hanoi, not Washington. But he said this was customary when bombing sorties are flown in response to action against U.S. reconnaissance aircraft.

Concerning his conversation with Reston, Kissinger said he had been trying to get in touch with the Times columnist for much of the day to discuss a pending luncheon engagement.

When Reston finally returned the call, according to Kissinger, it wasn't in anger as Reston had said, but the conversation was "jocular."

Kissinger said he told Reston, tongue-in-cheek, that the Times' phone calls had prevented him from taking the afternoon off to go shopping.

"That's all right," Kissinger quoted Reston as replying, "it would only add to the inflation."

During this conversation, Kissinger said Reston mentioned in passing: "What's this about knocking off the story?"

Kissinger explained his silence about the air raids. Then Reston said: "Let's knock it off for the weekend" and suggested the discussion be resumed at luncheon on Monday.

Footnote: Kissinger quoted liberally from a stenographic record of his conversations. He said he always has a secretary listening on an extension when he talks to reporters, and a record is made of the conversations.

Pilots No Secret

Despite the show of alarm in Washington over Egypt's use of Soviet pilots, this wasn't news to U.S. intelligence. For several months, pilots flying planes with Egyptian markings have been overheard talking in Russian with air control officers in Cairo.

The Soviet pilots have become more aggressive, however, since Soviet officers have lost their lives in Israeli air raids. At least three Russian military advisers are known to have been killed, for example, in the Israeli raids on the Tel al Kabir military complex west of the Suez Canal.

Now that the Russians are installing expensive new anti-aircraft defenses in Egypt, complete with crews to help man them, Soviet pilots are expected to be assigned to protect them.

What worries U.S. policymakers is that the Russians are gradually becoming involved in the Middle East war by the same inexorable process that dragged the United States ever deeper in the Vietnam war.

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RUSSIAN AIRMEN BELIEVED FLYING MISSIONS IN U.A.R.

But Evidence in Washington
Indicates Role Is Defense
of Egyptian Interior

U.S. CONCERN MOUNTING

No Direct Clashes Reported
—Israelis Limiting Their
Targets to Canal Area

By MAX FRANKEL

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 28 —

There is growing evidence that Soviet pilots are now participating in the defense of central Egypt against penetration raids by the Israeli Air Force. But no direct clashes have been reported so far.

Israeli diplomats say that their Government has become convinced over the last 10 days that Russian-speaking pilots flying MIG-21's are scrambling into attack formations at almost every potential approach by an Israeli plane, with orders to intercept.

United States officials are still studying their own intelligence reports, but in what is visibly an atmosphere of mounting concern. An intensified Soviet involvement in the Middle East fighting would be expected to have a serious effect on the balance of forces there.

Jets Reported Pursued

While Soviet and Israeli fliers have not made direct contact or exchanged any fire, the Israelis report that two of their planes were pursued by eight Soviet-flown MIG fighters on April 18, the day that a new pattern of Soviet operations was first detected.

The Israelis say that they have been careful since then to avoid provocative flights beyond the Suez Canal area, which they have concentrated

attacks. The Soviet pilots, in turn, are said to have been careful so far to avoid the canal region, as if to signal a primary interest at this time in the defense of Cairo and other population centers around which they have been replacing modern SAM-3 anti-aircraft missiles since early March.

Considerable Effect Seen

If the Russians purpose is to deter Israeli attacks on Cairo and Alexandria and on the Soviet missile sites, their action has already had a considerable effect. The last announced Israeli raid on targets in the Egyptian interior was on April 13. The two planes that turned tail at the approach of Soviet-flown MIG's on April 18 are said to have been on a reconnaissance mission. The Israelis say that none of their planes have penetrated so deeply since.

Neither American nor Israeli officials would discuss the detailed intelligence information on which they must base their judgments.

It had been established for some time that Russian-speaking pilots were flying reconnaissance missions in Soviet

planes with Egyptian markings over the Mediterranean, close to the vessels of the United States Sixth Fleet. Soviet pilots have also flown training missions in Egypt, presumably for the benefit of Egyptian fliers and ground controllers.

But this pattern of activity is said to have changed drastically earlier this month. The Israelis believe that the Russians are assuming responsibility — with missiles and planes — for the defense of most of the United Arab Republic, thus freeing the best Egyptian pilots for more combat duty near the Suez Canal and beyond it in the Israeli-occupied Sinai Peninsula. They also fear that Soviet pilots will eventually be ordered to join in the defense of the canal region, making a direct clash inevitable.

Even the most cautious analysts here appear to believe that the new flight operations by Russian-speaking pilots are designed, at the least, to train Soviet fliers for the active air defense of Egypt under combat conditions. They lead the Israelis to believe they are in fact performing

the same kind of operations. However, the destination of an oncoming Israeli fighter-bomber cannot be determined. Over the last 10 days, whenever Israeli planes heading for the canal region have approached Egyptian air space, MIG-21's in pairs and fours with Russian-speaking pilots at the controls are reported to have scrambled from three different bases in pursuit patterns. According to the Israelis, they have made ready to attack any intruder of the interior regions.

The planes are believed to bear Egyptian markings, but they have not been observed by Israeli pilots. At least 50 different Soviet fliers are said to have been overheard on many more sorties.

The anxiety prompted by the Soviet operations in Egypt extends in several directions. These include the following:

President Nixon has repeatedly cautioned the Soviet Union against "steps which could have the effect of drawing the major powers more deeply into the Arab-Israeli conflict." He said in his state-of-the-world message that he would view any effort by the Soviet Union "to seek predominance in the Middle East as a matter of grave concern."

The still developing involvement of Soviet fliers and soldiers in Egypt is seen here as an extension of Moscow's bid for "predominance." It is also seen as a commitment to the United Arab Republic from which the Soviet Union could not easily withdraw in case of still more intense fighting there.

Moreover, through the United States has no treaty commitments for the defense of Israel, it is pledged to supply her with enough arms to preserve "the military balance" in the area—meaning Israel's capacity to defend herself. In postponing action on Israel's latest request for additional Phantom and Skyhawk planes last month, Secretary of State William P. Rogers said that "if steps are taken which might upset the current balance or if in our judgement political developments warrant, the President will not hesitate to reconsider this matter."

The Nixon Administration interpreted this delay as an act of "restraint" and pleaded with Moscow to follow its example, despite earlier threats.

Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin had written to President Nixon early in February that if Israel continued her raids into central Egypt then the Soviet Union "will be forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal with the help of which a due rebuff be made."

American officials now believe this message may have been misleading and that arrangements for Egypt's air defense were actually concluded late in January, during President Gamal Abdel Nasser's visit to Moscow. Israeli officials tend to believe that Moscow has been testing American responses one step at a time and that the now evident flight operations were determined only after Washington postponed any further commitments or the sale of aircraft to the Israelis.

Either way, at least some officials here are seriously concerned that Moscow chose to act more boldly in the Middle East in the belief that the Nixon Administration was mired down in Southeastern Asia and was prevented by public opinion from any decisive defense of American interests abroad.

Israeli Army Declines Comment

Special to The New York Times

Jerusalem, April 28—An Israeli Army spokesman declined tonight to confirm a report from Washington that Israeli sources had said Russian pilots were flying air cover in Egyptian aircraft over the United Arab Republic.

He said that it had been known for some time that Russian pilots were flying reconnaissance missions in Egyptian aircraft over the Mediterranean, but he could add nothing about flying air cover over Egyptian territory.

Reports to this effect began circulating abroad some weeks ago. Israeli military officials said at the time that they had no independent information to support this speculation and have not confirmed it since then, officially or unofficially.

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Soviets Reported Flying for Egypt In Suez Combat

Nine Downed Defending New Missiles

By Jesse W. Lewis Jr.
Washington Post Foreign Service

BEIRUT, April 1—Soviet pilots were flying nine Egyptian air force Mig-21 fighters that were shot down in combat over the Suez Canal last week, according to reports here.

The Egyptian planes apparently were defending the sites of the new SA-3 surface-to-air missiles that the Soviet Union has sent to Egypt.

The sites were under attack from Israeli Skyhawk jets.

The Israelis were apparently using other faster aircraft—Mirages or Phantoms—to fly cover for the Skyhawks.

These Israeli fighters knocked down the Soviet-piloted Migs with cannon fire, according to the report.

It would be the first known instance of Soviet military personnel entering combat in the Middle East.

Most Pilots Survived

Four of the Egyptian planes were shot down on March 25 and five on March 27, all over Egyptian territory. Most of the pilots parachuted to earth although at least one is believed to have crashed with his plane.

These reports could not be verified officially.

Soviet pilots are not known to have flown Egyptian aircraft in combat before last week.

They have flown Russian-built Badger TU-16 planes with Egyptian markings on reconnaissance missions over the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. Early last month one of these planes and an American Navy F-4 from the carrier U.S.S. Franklin D. Roosevelt brushed against each other in midair. Neither was seriously damaged.

Regular Training Flights

Soviet pilots have regularly flown test and training missions in Egypt. As the Mig fighters are assembled after shipment, Soviet flyers check them out before turning them over to the Egyptians.

The Soviet pilots also have carried on an active program of developing Egyptian pilots, flying with them on training exercises. But there appears to be no doubt that the pilots downed last week were on combat missions.

The pilots are part of a large Soviet military mission, currently numbering between 4,000 and 5,000 men, stationed in Egypt as instructors and advisers.

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quest for more jet fighters, at least for the time being. His purpose, he explained, was to preserve the current balance of power in the Middle East.

But, at the March 21 news conference, he went on to add:

"In recent days there have been disturbing reports that the Soviet Union, by deliveries of new missiles . . . and through the use of military personnel, may be taking actions which could change that balance.

"It is too early to say whether that is the case. We are watching the situation closely.

"If the U.S.S.R., by its military assistance programs to Israeli's neighbors, does essentially change the balance, then the United States would take action to deal with that situation."

[In Washington, United States government sources said that they had no confirmation of the Beirut report.]

Soviet Mideast Role Developed Slowly

The report from Beirut yesterday that Soviet pilots have flown combat missions against Israel indicates a deepening of military involvement that began in 1955 with the first sale of East-bloc arms to Egypt.

The guns came from Czechoslovakia, but the sale represented the dividends of Soviet investment in the Aswan High Dam, a major Egyptian power project the United States declined to finance.

The Soviet Union, long eager to establish a position in the Middle East, succeeded by becoming arms supplier to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen and of late even the Sudan.

As crisis began in the area, and as Israel more and more adept militarily, the armaments supplied became more sophisticated.

With the advanced weapons came advisers. The most recent influx arrived about two weeks ago. These estimated 1,500 technicians and troops put the total at about 5,000.

At the same time, the Soviet Union has built up its fleet in the Mediterranean.

The supplying of arms to the Arabs and the fleet build-up represent a major investment in both hardware and prestige by the Russians. In the six-day war of June, 1967, Egypt lost in the field, the Soviet Union in prestige and in the pocketbook.

Among the new arms given to re-arm Egypt were SA-2 missiles. These were intended in large part to protect Egyptian artillery batteries along the Suez Canal.

These batteries were used effectively against Israeli positions along the canal until Israeli pilots began avoiding the SA-2 detection system by flying low and destroyed the entire Egyptian missile defense system along the canal.

This opened Egyptian skies to deep raids by Israeli pilots—raids that reached the outskirts of Cairo. Only in recent weeks have Egyptian planes gone up to challenge the Israelis.

The new SA-3 missiles, sup-

plied to Egypt about two weeks ago, although untested, are believed to be effective against low-flying aircraft.